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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 VATICAN 005471

SIPDIS

STATE FOR EUR/WE (MENNUTI)

E.O. 12958: DECL: 11/07/2012

TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [CU](#) [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [CU](#) [VT](#) [VTPREL](#)

SUBJECT: HOLY SEE CAUTIOUS ON CUBAN DISSIDENTS

REF: A. A) HAVANA 6982

[B](#). B) HAVANA 7233 C) HAVANA 7566 D) MILAN 692

CLASSIFIED BY: D. BRENT HARDT, CDA, REASON E.O. 12958 1.5 (B,D)

SUMMARY

[1](#)1. (C) HOLY SEE DIRECTOR OF CARIBBEAN AFFAIRS PAINTED A
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PICTURE OF A DEFENSIVE CUBAN CATHOLIC CHURCH IN A NOVEMBER 6
MEETING WITH POLOFFS TO DISCUSS CUBA AND VENEZUELA (VENEZUELA
REPORTED SEPTEL). MSGR. GIORGIO LINGUA SAID THE HOLY SEE AND
CUBAN CHURCH HAVE DECIDED NOT TO ENGAGE IN OVERTLY POLITICAL
SUPPORT OF DEMOCRATIC DISSIDENTS IN CUBA IN ORDER TO AVOID A
CRACKDOWN ON THE CHURCH BY THE GOC. HE NOTED THAT THE ONE
CHURCH-RELATED PUBLICATION THAT ENGAGES IN POLITICAL
COMMENTARY, "VITRAL," HAS CAUSED THE HOLY SEE SOME DIFFICULTY
WITH CUBAN AUTHORITIES, ADDING THAT THE HOLY SEE HAD
ENCOURAGED THE BISHOP RESPONSIBLE FOR IT TO RESPOND
POSITIVELY TO CUBAN AUTHORITIES' DEMAND THAT IT BE REGISTERED
DESPITE THE BISHOP'S FEARS OF CENSORSHIP. END SUMMARY.

A CHURCH PLAYING DEFENSE

[1](#)2. (C) FOLLOWING UP ON RECENT USINT REPORTING ON CATHOLIC
CHURCH ACTIVITIES IN CUBA (REFTELS), POLOFFS CALLED ON
VATICAN COUNTRY DIRECTOR FOR THE CARIBBEAN STATES, MSGR.
GIORGIO LINGUA, NOVEMBER 6 TO DISCUSS THE HOLY SEE'S VIEWS OF
THE STATE OF THE CHURCH AND DEMOCRATIC DISSIDENCE IN CUBA.
WE ASKED WHETHER THE PAPAL NUNCIO HAS DEVELOPED AND MAINTAINS
CONTACTS WITH THE DISSIDENT COMMUNITY AND WHETHER THE HOLY
SEE WOULD TAKE A POSITION ON A CUBAN HUMAN RIGHTS RESOLUTION.
LINGUA RESPONDED THAT HE WAS NOT AWARE OF ANY INTENTION OF
THE HOLY SEE TO ENGAGE ON THE HR RESOLUTION, EVEN BEHIND THE
SCENES. FURTHERMORE, HE SAID THE HOLY SEE SUPPORTS THE CUBAN
CHURCH'S CAUTIOUS APPROACH TO POLITICAL ACTIVITIES, AND WAS
NOT AWARE OF ANY PLANNED OUTREACH TO CUBA'S DISSIDENT
COMMUNITY BY THE NUNCIO. HE INDICATED THAT THE CHURCH (AND
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THE HOLY SEE) PHILOSOPHICALLY SUPPORTED GREATER POLITICAL
FREEDOMS IN CUBA. HOWEVER, HE PAINTED A PICTURE OF A CHURCH
IN A FUNDAMENTALLY DEFENSIVE POSTURE. ITS OVERRIDING CONCERN
WAS TO MAINTAIN THE ABILITY OF THE FAITHFUL TO PRACTICE THEIR
FAITH AND TO AVOID A CRACKDOWN BY THE GOC ON THE CHURCH'S OWN
LIMITED FREEDOM.

[1](#)3. (C) AS AN EXAMPLE OF THIS CAUTION, LINGUA POINTED TO THE
FACT THAT ALMOST ALL CHURCH PUBLICATIONS IN CUBA AVOID
EXPLICITLY POLITICAL COMMENTARY. HE SAID THE ONLY EXCEPTION
IS THE PUBLICATION OF THE PINAR DEL RIO DIOCESE'S NEWSLETTER
"VITRAL," WHOSE EDITOR, DAGOBERTO VALDEZ, WAS A RELATIVELY
OUTSPOKEN CRITIC OF THE GOC. LINGUA TOLD US THAT THE HOLY
SEE HAD RECEIVED NUMEROUS COMPLAINTS ABOUT VITRAL FROM THE
CUBAN EMBASSY TO THE HOLY SEE. IN RESPONSE, THE HOLY SEE HAS
ALWAYS UNDERSCORED THE PAPER'S RIGHT TO FREEDOM OF
EXPRESSION. ON THE OTHER HAND, HE SAID THE HOLY SEE HAD
URGED THE BISHOP OF PINAR DEL RIO TO "REGISTER" THE PAPER
WITH CUBAN AUTHORITIES AS THE LATTER HAVE BEEN DEMANDING.
THE HOLY SEE THOUGHT IT NORMAL FOR REVENUE GENERATING
ACTIVITIES SUCH AS VITRAL TO HAVE TO REGISTER WITH CIVIL
AUTHORITIES. BUT, ACCORDING TO LINGUA, THE BISHOP FEARED
CENSORSHIP AND HAD SO FAR REFUSED TO REGISTER THE PAPER.

[1](#)4. (C) QUERIED AS TO WHY THE CHURCH IN CUBA, AN
HISTORICALLY CATHOLIC COUNTRY, WASN'T AS ACTIVE IN THE FIGHT
FOR FREEDOM AS HAD BEEN THE POLISH CHURCH, LINGUA NOTED THAT
THE CHURCH HAD ALWAYS CHARTED A CAUTIOUS COURSE IN CUBA, YET
IT WAS NEVER SUPPRESSED IN THE SAME MANNER AS HAD BEEN THE
CASE IN MANY COUNTRIES OF EASTERN EUROPE. CATHOLIC CLERGY,
EVEN BISHOPS, WERE ALL CUBANS, NOT FOREIGN, AND HAD RETAINED
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THE RIGHT TO PRACTICE AND PROMOTE THEIR FAITH. THEY HAD NOT
BEEN THROWN INTO A GULAG, AS HAD BEEN THE CASE IN EASTERN

EUROPE, AND THUS DID NOT FEEL AS THREATENED BY "OLD FASHIONED SOCIALISM" AS THEIR EASTERN EUROPEAN BRETHREN. NEVERTHELESS, LINGUA RECOGNIZED THAT THE CHURCH WAS CONSTRAINED, AS IT NEITHER HOSTED POLITICAL EVENTS NOR PROVIDED RESOURCES FOR POLITICAL ACTIVITIES (SUCH AS PROVIDING MEETING SPACES) IN ORDER TO AVOID PROVOKING THE GOC.

SEEKING SPACE AMIDST CONSTRAINTS

15. (C) IN REVIEWING CURRENT RESTRICTIONS IMPOSED ON THE CHURCH, LINGUA ACKNOWLEDGED THAT THE CHURCH'S SOCIAL INSTITUTIONS (SUCH AS EDUCATION AND HEALTHCARE) HAD BEEN TAKEN OVER BY THE STATE AFTER THE REVOLUTION, AND THAT MANY CHURCH PROPERTIES HAD BEEN CONFISCATED. IN ADDITION, HE

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ACTION EUR-00

INFO LOG-00 NP-00 AMAD-00 CIAE-00 INL-00 DODE-00 WHA-00
DS-00 EAP-00 FBIE-00 VC-00 TEDE-00 INR-00 IO-00
LAB-01 VCE-00 NSAE-00 OIC-02 EPAP-00 DSCC-00 PRM-00
DRL-02 NFAT-00 SAS-00 /005W
-----0560F0 080950Z /38

P 080839Z NOV 02
FM AMEMBASSY VATICAN
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY
INFO AMEMBASSY ROME
AMCONSUL MILAN
USINT HAVANA
USMISSION GENEVA

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NOTED THAT THE GOC CLOSELY SCRUTINIZES THE VISA APPLICATIONS AND ACTIVITIES IN CUBA OF NON-CUBAN RELIGIOUS WORKERS -- PARTICULARLY THOSE ENGAGED IN EDUCATIONAL ACTIVITIES. ASKED WHETHER THE HOLY SEE HAD DISCUSSED ANY CONCERNS WITH THE ITALIAN GOVERNMENT ABOUT THE LOMBARDY REGIONAL GOVERNMENT'S AGREEMENT TO REFURBISH A FORMER CHURCH PROPERTY (REF D), LINGUA APPEARED UNAWARE OF THE DECISION AND WAS NON-COMMITTAL.

NO PLANS FOR TRANSITION

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16. (C) POLOFFS PRESSED LINGUA WHETHER THE HOLY SEE HAD GIVEN ANY THOUGHT TO PREPARING FOR AN EVENTUAL DEMOCRATIC TRANSITION IN CUBA, AND HE OFFERED HIS VIEW THAT SUCH A TRANSITION, WHILE INEVITABLE, COULD BE MANY YEARS AWAY, EVEN YEARS AFTER FIDEL CASTRO LEAVES THE SCENE. HE NOTED THAT MANY OF HIS CUBAN INTERLOCUTORS WERE REVOLUTIONARY "TRUE BELIEVERS."

ENDING EMBARGO WOULD STIMULATE REFORM

17. (C) TURNING TO THE EMBARGO, LINGUA MAINTAINED THAT EVEN THOUGH THE EMBARGO WAS NOT RESPONSIBLE FOR CUBA'S DIRE ECONOMIC STRAITS, WERE IT TO BE LIFTED THE GOC WOULD HAVE NO MORE EXCUSES FOR ITS POOR PERFORMANCE; ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL REFORMS WOULD NECESSARILY FOLLOW. REFLECTING VIEWS WE HAVE HEARD AT CARITAS, LINGUA BELIEVED PHASING OUT THE EMBARGO WOULD BE "JUST" AS WELL AS "SMART," AS A REFORM PROCESS WOULD HELP AVOID A SUDDEN POLARIZATION OF CUBAN SOCIETY THAT COULD LEAD TO VIOLENCE DURING A POST-CASTRO TRANSITION.

COMMENT

17. (C) THE HOLY SEE'S CONTINUED CAUTION ON ITS APPROACH TO CUBA AND ITS UNWILLINGNESS TO CONSIDER PLANNING FOR A POST-REVOLUTIONARY CUBA ARE CHARACTERISTIC OF THE
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TRADITIONALLY CAUTIOUS VATICAN DIPLOMATIC CORPS. IT ALSO REFLECTS A GROWING RESIGNATION THAT THE POPE'S HISTORIC 1998

HISTORIC VISIT TO CUBA HAS CHANGED LITTLE. IN THE PAST WE HAVE HEARD DISAPPOINTMENT FROM THE VATICAN AT LACK OF PROGRESS IN RELIGIOUS FREEDOM AFTER THE POPE'S HISTORIC 1998 VISIT TO CUBA, WHEREAS NOW, THEY APPEAR WILLING TO TAKE HALF-A-LOAF AND WAIT FOR POLITICAL CONDITIONS TO IMPROVE BEFORE PRESSING HARD FOR GREATER FREEDOMS. AS A RESULT, WE EXPECT THE HOLY SEE (IF NOT ALL OF ITS BISHOPS) WILL REMAIN DISCRETE IN DEALINGS WITH CUBA'S DISSIDENT COMMUNITY, WHILE PATIENTLY SEEKING TO MAINTAIN AND EXPAND SPACE FOR RELIGIOUS ACTIVITIES. WE WILL CONTINUE TO ENCOURAGE THE HOLY SEE TO ENGAGE MORE DIRECTLY WITH DISSIDENTS AND RAISE ITS VOICE AS THE POPE DID IN 1998 FOR BROADER HUMAN RIGHTS IN CUBA.
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